



Hoping to have success with a program tried in other cities, a City Council measure proposes Boston motorists sign a piece of paper pledging they will obey speed limits and generally be good. Here, a Greensboro, North Carolina, sticker reminding people to share the road and stay under the speed limit. (Hand-out)

## Peer pressure in passing lane City wants you to slow down; in fact, it's asking for your pledge

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By Matt Viser, Globe Staff | June 7, 2007

People make pledges of many kinds, to have and to hold, to tell the truth and nothing but the truth; some take vows of poverty or chastity. But as life-changing promises go, here is a whopper: I'll never drive faster than the posted speed limit.

Looking for ways to attack a problem city councilors say draws more complaints than virtually any other, they are proposing that Boston's notoriously aggressive drivers sign oaths swearing they will obey traffic laws at all times. To promote their pledges to back off the gas, those drivers would also affix bumper stickers to their cars urging others to do the same.

Councilor Robert Consalvo -- with support from his colleagues, police, and city officials -- introduced the proposal yesterday in a measure that suggests that motorists should also promise to be courteous to bicyclists and pedestrians.

If this all seems laughable in a city where drivers have attained a unique reputation as chronic lawbreakers, Consalvo says peer pressure could go a long way toward turning that around.

"We have to change the culture about how we drive," said Consalvo, who was caught speeding on the Massachusetts Turnpike in 1997. "Everybody drives too fast. But we have a speed limit for a reason, and drivers should respect that limit.

"You empower neighborhood residents to become involved and take back their streets," he said. "By having a visible decal, they are in essence acting as moving speed bumps."

Others think that's a tall order in a frenetic driving culture like Boston's.

"If you're late for work, you go faster," said Alfredo Steward, a Boston University maintenance worker who commutes every day from Pawtucket, R.I., and tends to keep his red Saturn going 5 or 10 miles per hour over the speed limit. "Or you're late for a movie, you go faster. It would never work. You'd get honked at, road rage, the middle finger, swearing. You name it."

Some cities have tried pledge programs, and all but a few of those efforts stalled without ever really taking off.

Palo Alto, Calif., started a pace-car program three years ago, but did not continue it after the first year, when about 400 residents signed on. Atlanta began a program in 1999, but only 1,400 people in a city of 416,500 joined. In Greensboro, N.C., which has been handing out stickers since 2003, only 77 residents participate. Officials in Northampton also implemented a pace-car program last year to slow drivers down; about 150 residents have signed up, which they

consider a success.

Consalvo says he can pull off a program in Boston by first enlisting city employees, who would put stickers on each of Boston's city-owned vehicles. Then, the program could be expanded by going to neighborhood groups for pledge-takers.

"Councilor Consalvo should be applauded for thinking out of the box," said Thomas J. Tinlin, the city's transportation commissioner. "We promote anything that slows people down. It's not as though we're saying, don't do 30, do 20. What we're asking people to do is abide by the law."

The city has tried adding speed bumps, but they become a hindrance for snowplows, police cruisers, and fire trucks. Police have used targeted enforcement in trouble spots, but the effects are limited.

For the past two years, Councilor John Tobin's office has been distributing red "Slow Down Boston" signs to anyone who will take one.

The state sets the speed limit in thickly settled areas such as Boston; for years the mayor and City Council have sought permission to decrease speed limits in some areas, from 30 to 25 miles per hour. But legislation has never gained traction at the State House.

"The department is in support of initiatives that encourage compliance to road rules," said police spokeswoman Elaine Driscoll. "The Boston police greatly appreciate Councilor Consalvo's ongoing commitment to public safety."

Yesterday, six councilors rose in support of Consalvo's measure, though several of those have had a number of driving citations of their own.

Some drivers outside City Hall, even those inclined to good driving habits, expressed some skepticism about the measure.

"It's like the traffic equivalent of, 'My kid is an A student,' " said Stephen Fox, chairman of the Rutland Square Association and a public safety advocate. "I don't want to discount it, but I don't think it's the sole solution."

A dozen drivers interviewed at an Allston gas station yesterday all said the idea would not work.

"People need some sort of monetary incentive," said Jessica Eddy, 22, of Allston. "A cut in insurance, or gas cards, something. I wouldn't just sign up for the fun of it."

"I have a job, and sometimes I have to drive faster," said Nelson Ferraz, a 39-year-old pizza delivery driver from Medford. "You deliver cold pizza, a guy doesn't want cold pizza. People want hot pizza."

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